CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method in a data processing system for automatically initiating the replenishment of a consumable product, comprising:

on a first date, fulfilling an order by a consumer for a first instance of the product;

based upon the first date, estimating a second date by which the first instance of the product will be fully consumed;

before the second date, providing to the consumer an indication that the product should be replenished, the indicating including a control usable by the consumer to request replenishment of the product;

receiving an indication that the control was used by the consumer to request replenishment of the product; and

in response solely to receiving the indication, ordering a second instance of the product to replenish the first instance.

2. A method in a data processing system for ordering an item, comprising:

on a first date, fulfilling an order by a consumer for a first item;

determining a target date for suggesting replenishment of the first item, the target date based upon the first date and the identity of the first item;

on the target date, providing to the consumer an indication that the first item should be replenished, the indication including a control usable by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item;

receiving an indication that the control was used by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item; and

in response solely to receiving the indication, ordering a second item to replenish the first item.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the control is usable by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item by performing a single interaction.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein the second item is a physical article.

5. The method of claim 2 wherein the second item is a data product.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein the second item is a service.

7. The method of claim 2 wherein the target date is determined based on an average life span of the first item.

8. The method of claim 2 wherein the target date is determined based on an expiration date for the first item.

9. The method of claim 2 wherein the target date is determined based on an availability date for the second item.

10. The method of claim 2 wherein the target date is determined based on the length of the intervals between the prior purchases.

11. The method of claim 2 wherein the consumer has made a plurality of prior purchases of a complement of the first item, and wherein the target date is determined based on the length of the intervals between the prior purchases.

12. The method of claim 2 wherein a target date is determined based on the size of the first item.

13. The method of claim 2 wherein the target date is determined based on information provided by the consumer.

14. The method of claim 2 wherein a target date is determined based on information about the consumer's lifestyle.

15. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computer system to order an item by:

receiving an indication of an order by a consumer for a first item having a first date;

determining a target date based upon the identity of the first item; and

on the target date, providing to the consumer an indication that the first item should be replenished.

16. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the provided indication includes a control usable by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item, the method further comprising:

receiving an indication that the control was used by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item; and

in response to receiving the indication, ordering a second item to replenish the first item.

17. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the control is usable by the consumer to request replenishment of the first item by performing a single interaction.

18. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the first date is a date on which the order for the first item was placed.

19. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the first date is a date on which the order for the first item was fulfilled.

20. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the target date is determined based on an average life span of the first item.

21. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the target date is determined based on an expiration date for the first item.

22. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the target date is determined based on an availability date for the second item.

23. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the consumer has made a plurality of prior purchases of the first item, and wherein the target date is determined based on the length of the intervals between the prior purchases.

24. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the consumer has made a plurality of prior purchases of a complement of the first item, and wherein the target date is determined based on the length of the intervals between the prior purchases.

25. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein a target date is determined based on the size of the first item.

26. The computer-readable medium of claim 15 wherein the target date is determined based on information provided by the consumer.

27. A method in a data processing system for assessing item replenishment, comprising:

determining that a purchasing entity possesses an item;

determining an expiration time for the item; and

scheduling for a time preceding the determined expiration time a communication to the purchasing entity indicating that the item should be replenished.

28. The method of claim 27, further comprising delivering the communication at the scheduled time.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein the delivered communication contains a control for ordering an additional item to replenish the item.

30. The method of claim 29, further comprising:

receiving an indication that the purchasing entity used the control contained in the delivered communication to order an additional item to replenish the item; and

in response to receiving the indication, ordering an additional item to replenish the item.

31. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a data processing system to assess item replenishment by:

determining that a purchasing entity is using an item;

determining an expiration time for the item; and

scheduling for a time preceding the determined expiration time a communication to the purchasing entity indicating that the item should be replenished.

32. The computer-readable medium of claim 31, further comprising delivering the communication at the scheduled time.

33. The computer-readable medium of claim 32 wherein the delivered communication contains a control for ordering an additional item to replenish the item.

34. The computer-readable medium of claim 33, further comprising:

receiving an indication that the purchasing entity used the control contained in the delivered communication to order an additional item to replenish the item; and

in response to receiving the indication, ordering an additional item to replenish the item.

35. A system for automatic item replenishment, comprising:

a replenishment targeting subsystem that, for a particular item purchased by a purchaser on a purchased date, determines a target date for replenishment of the item;

a replenishment proposal subsystem that transmits to the purchaser in advance of the target date determined for the item by the replenishment targeting subsystem a replenishment proposal to order a replacement for the item; and

a replenishment ordering subsystem that orders a replacement for the item responsive to an affirmative response to the replenishment proposal from the purchaser.

36. A computer memory containing an item replenishment data structure, the data structure comprising a plurality of entries, each entry comprising an identification of a consumer, an identification of an item, and an indication of a target date on which the replenishment of the item is to be proposed, such that, on a current date, for each entry indicating the current date as its target date, a communication can be transmitted to the consumer identified by the entry proposing the replenishment of the item identified by the entry.

37. The computer memory of claim 36 wherein the item replenishment data structure further comprises, for each of a plurality of dates, an indication of the entries indicating the date as their target date.

38. A generated data signal conveying a item replenishment data structure, the data structure comprising a plurality of entries, each entry comprising an

identification of a consumer, an identification of an item, and an indication of a target date on which the replenishment of the item is to be proposed, such that, on a current date, for an entry indicating the current date as its target date, a communication can be transmitted to the consumer identified by the entry proposing the replenishment of the item identified by the entry.

39. A method in a computer system for automatically replenishing an item, comprising

determining that a consumer is using an item;

determining a target date for replenishing the item; and

without intervention by the consumer, placing an order on the consumer's behalf for replenishment of the item within a predetermined tolerance of the target replenishment date.

40. The method of claim 39 wherein the consumer has made a plurality of prior purchases of the item, and wherein the target replenishment date is determined based on the length of the intervals between the prior purchases.

41. A method in a data processing system for suggesting item replenishment, comprising:

determining that a purchasing entity is using an item;

establishing a condition for suggesting replenishment of the item;

testing the condition;

when testing indicates that the condition is satisfied, raising an event; and

when the event is raised, suggesting replenishment of the item to the purchasing entity.

42. The method of claim 41 wherein the established condition is a temporal condition.

43. The method of claim 41 wherein the established condition is the availability of a replacement item.